

# Heavy drinkers risk muscle loss, new study finds

May 24 2023

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Heavy drinkers could be putting themselves at risk of muscle loss and frailty in later life, according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

A new study published today shows with statistical modeling that people

with the lowest amount of muscle were drinking 10 units or more a day—about a bottle of wine.

Because larger people have more [muscle mass](#), the research team scaled for body size. And they took into account factors such as [protein consumption](#) and [physical activity](#).

The team say that their findings, mainly in people in their 50s and 60s, suggest another reason to cut back on booze.

Prof Ailsa Welch, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "Losing muscle as we age leads to problems with weakness and frailty in later life."

"Alcohol intake is a major modifiable risk factor for many diseases, so we wanted to find out more about the relationship between drinking and muscle health as we age."

The team studied data from the UK Biobank—a large-scale database of anonymized lifestyle and health information from half a million people in the UK.

They looked at data for nearly 200,000 people aged between 37 and 73 years.

Dr. Jane Skinner, also of UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "We studied how much alcohol people were drinking and compared it with how much muscle they had, according to their body size. "

"We also took into account things like how much protein they consumed, their levels of physical activity and other factors that could make a difference to how much muscle they might have."

"Most of the people were in their 50s and 60s. We found that those who drank a lot of alcohol had a lower amount of skeletal muscle compared to people who drank less, after we took into account their body sizes and other factors."

"We saw that it really became a problem when people were drinking 10 or more units a day—which is the equivalent of about a bottle of wine or four or five pints."

"Alcohol consumption and muscle mass were measured cross-sectionally—in people at the same time—so we can't be sure of a causal link," she added.

Prof Welch said, "This study shows that alcohol may have [harmful effects](#) on muscle mass at higher levels of consumption. "

"We know that losing muscle as we age leads to problems with weakness and frailty, so this suggests another reason to avoid drinking high amounts of alcohol routinely in middle and early older age," she added.

"Alcohol consumption and measures of sarcopenic muscle risk: cross-sectional and prospective associations within the UK Biobank Study" is published in the journal *Calcified Tissue International*.

**More information:** Alcohol consumption and measures of sarcopenic muscle risk: cross-sectional and prospective associations within the UK Biobank Study, *Calcified Tissue International* (2023).

Provided by University of East Anglia

Citation: Heavy drinkers risk muscle loss, new study finds (2023, May 24) retrieved 27 April

2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-heavy-drinkers-muscle-loss.html>

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